

**Power and Resistance in Further Education:  
findings from a study of first-tier managers**

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# **Power and Resistance in Further Education: findings from a study of first-tier managers**

## **Abstract**

This article presents findings from a study of first-tier managers in four further education colleges as they attempt to manage perpetual change within a context of performativity and mistrust. It begins with a discussion of power in the sector before presenting findings of routine resistance against ever increasing control and surveillance within colleges. First-tier managers were found to be primarily the audience for routine resistance rather than the target and so faced the dilemma of colluding with resistance to maintain cooperation, or challenging the behaviours. The article concludes that despite the demonisation of critical opinions in the lifelong learning sector, resistance in further education, far from contravening the principles of academic citizenship, is a form of educational fundamentalism and an attempt to prioritise learners in the face of financial and managerial imperatives.

## **Introduction**

Further education (FE) is a prime context for a study of routine organisational resistance, having experienced New Public Management reforms more acutely than other areas of the public sector. Yet while teachers within FE may increasingly be looking to the union for protection (Mather & Worrall, 2007), marketisation, managerialism and performativity – Ball's (2003) three policy technologies – may have foregrounded individualisation to such an extent that effective collective resistance is a distant memory, with many refusing to strike (*Times Education Supplement*, 2010a). However, the decline of strikes should not be equated with the death of resistance and the triumph of post-bureaucratic management practices. This article argues that in FE, resistance has become routine and everyday, enacted in staffrooms, corridors and meeting rooms, performed through cynicism, cutting corners and sabotage. Yet the temptation to reify routine resistance must be avoided (Hoffman, 1999; Fleming & Spicer, 2008). While often principled and value driven in the best traditions of academic citizenship (Macfarlane, 2007), resistance is also pragmatic and selfinterested, a means of getting through the emotional and cognitive labours of each day. In this context are first-tier managers (FTMs), often called Programme Managers or Curriculum Leaders, the immediate supervisors of lecturers and, therefore, simultaneously teachers and managers. As such, they provide an ideal lens through which to study resistance within colleges, providing insights from the perspective of the managed and the manager.

## **Power in Further Education**

For many, power relations in the FE sector were transformed by the incorporation of colleges in 1992 (see Ainley & Bailey, 1997; Shain & Gleeson, 1999; Watson & Crossley, 2001) which gave financial independence to colleges and freed them from the governance of local education authorities. Colleges became businesses, principals became CEOs and colleges entered the marketplace in a 'climate of entrepreneurialism' (Smith, 2007, p. 55). Competitiveness, it was assumed, would be the catalyst that would increase the 'quality' of post-16 education as colleges were forced to fight with other providers for funded student numbers. However, as Smith argues, post-incorporation colleges, often ill equipped for competitive strategy, tended to prioritise financial imperatives before the teaching community: lecturers declined in numbers, worked longer hours, endured insecurity of employment, insufficient support, increased disciplinary actions and high levels of stress and exhaustion (Gibbons, 1998; Burchill, 2001).

To understand the exercise of power in FE and the full impact of incorporation, the sector should be considered within the schema of wider public sector reform and the emergence of New Public Management (NPM), the adjoining of the post-war trends of administrative reform and the

adoption of private sector management theories and practices (Hood, 1991). NPM, a set of organisational doctrines in Hood's terms, emphasised 'professional' management, competition, measurement of standards, 'discipline' in resource allocations and a greater emphasis on outputs. While these doctrines will be familiar throughout the public sector, in FE the implementation of the doctrinal codes of NPM have been 'forced through to a greater extent, and in a more compressed period of time, than in other parts of the public sector' (Burchill, 2001, p. 146). Yet while Hood sees NPM in terms of systemic organisational functionality, NPM is arguably the source and the legitimisation of power and control in the public sector; further education provides the ideal example.

Hoggett (1996) argues that public sector reform, rather than representing a paradigmatic shift to post-bureaucratic forms of management, consisted of three strategies of control: the creation of decentralised units with a 'simultaneous attempt to increase centralized control over strategy and policy' (p. 9); competition between providers as a means of regulating decentralised units; finally, and perhaps most critically, the development of performance management and monitoring mechanisms. All three strategies of control are ubiquitous within FE. While incorporation was technically an act of decentralisation, with colleges being given control of their own finances and organisational strategy, the rigour of government policy and funding mechanisms meant that the actual autonomy of colleges was limited and recentralised. The second strategy of control – competition among providers – created a climate of insecurity and compliance in the interests of institutional survival as providers competed for diminishing funding streams. Finally, there is performativity, 'a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change' (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Arguably it is the performance management apparatus that is the most pervasive (and visible) strategy of control within the FE sector, the rise of the audit culture (Scaife, 2004; Steer et al, 2007; Hodgkinson, 2008), a means of centralising the decentralised, an aggrandisement of 'quality' into the primary determinant of continued existence for a college.

The audit culture in FE can be seen as the principal means of accountability in the sector, the mechanisms of surveillance operating panoptically, as 'inspection functions ceaselessly' (Foucault, 1991, p. 195). Control from the panoptic perspective is maintained via the internalisation of the mechanisms of discipline through the process of individualisation and the constant potential gaze of the surveiller; in FE, panopticism is embedded within the 'quality' paradigm, the observation of teaching by internal inspectors and external agencies such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), as well as the endless mechanised data collection on student attendance, punctuality, achievement and retention. Yet, arguably, surveillance has also become evident in horizontal structures, in the post-bureaucratic emphasis on teamwork and concertive control (Barker, 1993; Sewell, 1998; Avis, 1999; Knights & McCabe, 2003), panopticism inscribed within the functions of peers rather than superordinates. And further than this, with the creation of the Institute for Learning (IfL), the professional regulatory body for the sector (the equivalent of the soon to be scrapped General Teaching Council), self-surveillance has become part of lecturers' job descriptions: teachers in colleges are now required to report their continuing professional development activities each year, the contents of which may or may not be reviewed by the IfL. Any lecturer failing to document their activities is deemed to have violated the 'Code of Professional Practice' (IfL, 2010a) set by the IfL and risks punishment or the removal of their licence to practise. Yet while the IfL may be founded upon panoptic principles, its power also marks a return to the pre-penal metaphors of discipline and punishment: lecturers who are judged to have breached the code of professional conduct have the details of their cases displayed upon the IfL's website (IfL, 2010b) in a rendering of Foucault's (1991) notion of the 'spectacle of the scaffold', which does not re-establish justice but reactivates power. Public punishment serves as a reminder to others of what the IfL is capable of should it be challenged.

Accompanying the insecurity of the market and the terrors of performativity – and perhaps as a result of these forces – was the rise of managerialism in the sector (Harper, 1997; Ainley & Bailey, 1997), the enactment of management's 'right' to manage. Together with the creation of mission statements and strategic plans (the tools in part responsible for corporate cloning (Covaeski et al,

1998)), managerialism embodied a concern for the systemic rather than the organic, the transplantation of business methodologies such as Total Quality Management and Human Resource Management and finally, perhaps most crucially, the control of work previously left to autonomous professionals. Here, then, is the colonisation of professional identity (Ackroyd et al, 2007), with lecturers being controlled in every aspect of their work. While there is disagreement about whether lecturers are deprofessionalised (Avis & Bathmaker, 2004; Mather et al, 2008), unprofessionalised (Colley & James, 2005), professionally reconstructed (Gleeson et al, 2005) or deprofessionalised and reprofessionalised at the same time (Jephcote & Salisbury, 2009), there is agreement that professionalism is a highly contested terrain. Furthermore, managerialism in the sector possesses intensely masculine characteristics (Gleeson & Knights, 2008) emphasising rationality, task-orientation, combativeness and competition, features 'embedded within the relations of power and resistance' (Kerfoot & Whitehead, 1998, p. 440). The exponents of 'new' managerialism create identities that emphasise power and control at the same time as concealing the vulnerability of their own position, adopting a masculine subjectivity of aggression, heightened visibility and working long hours.

## **Resistance**

Foucault (1979) reminds us that 'where there is power, there is resistance' and against the backdrop of competition, performativity, surveillance, individualisation and managerialism, lecturers in FE will inevitably resist. Yet resistance is an elastic concept. For some it is ensconced within the labour struggle, expressed in strikes and walkouts. For others resistance is located within certain hairstyles (Weitz, 2001) and even, in particular social settings, pornography (Langman, 2008). In some accounts resistance is specific to the workplace; elsewhere it is embedded within everyday life, an antidote to the drudgery of existence (Cohen & Taylor, 1978). Visible or invisible, recognised or unrecognised, there are two elements of resistance that are common throughout the literature (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004): resistance involves action and opposition.

However, in the post-bureaucratic workplace of high-commitment strategies such as teamwork, increasingly sophisticated surveillance and the internalisation of organisational values, resistance has come to be seen as irrational, a question of the 'psychiatric stability of workers' (Fleming & Sewell, 2002, p. 861) rather than the exploitation of labour. Here, narratives that demonise critical opinions flourish (Tourish & Robson, 2006) and subjectivity and autonomy are colonised (Casey, 1995, 1999). Instead, resistance often becomes covert, spontaneous, individualised and routine, a part of everyday life in organisations.

From a labour process theory perspective (Jermier et al, 1994; Thompson, 2003; Taylor & Bain, 2003) where power is hegemonic (Ollin, 2005), resistance is 'understood to be the inevitable result of the objective exploitation of labour by capital' (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1669), a struggle between management and workers over resources. From this perspective, management is engaged in the process of appropriation of resources from workers, a process embedded within the sectoral reforms in FE: time is appropriated via longer working hours and shorter holidays; job security is appropriated via casualisation; wages are appropriated by ending national pay negotiations; finally, as discussed above, professional identity is appropriated via the processes of proletarianisation (Eden, 2001; Humphreys & Hoque, 2007). Resistance, then, from a labour process theory perspective, is a matter of re-appropriation: time, for example, is taken back through strikes or walkouts or through 'banana time' (May, 1999) and long breaks; money may be re-appropriated Power and Resistance in Further Education 129 through theft or fiddling (Noon & Blyton, 1997); identity may be re-appropriated via humour (Taylor & Bain, 2003) or 'constructive subversions' (Ollin, 2005).

However, labour process theory gives little account of the subjectivity of workers and how they make sense of their work contexts. By focusing on the structural and systemic antecedents of resistance, it largely precludes an examination of the agentive nature of workers, the terrain of

resistance as micro-politics. Here resistance is less a product of the structural and class-based struggle in the workplace than an examination of the 'discursive dynamics of the construction of subjectivities' (Spicer & Bohm 2007, p. 1670) within the everyday contestation of power and resistance. Here then, rather than workers being engaged in the processes of re-appropriation, they are concerned with negotiating their identities and protecting their selves as individuals work the system and subvert official procedures (Goffman, 1971), exploit loopholes (Noon & Blyton, 1997), negotiate their own space (Fleming & Sewell, 2002) and adopt impression management techniques (Bolino, 1999).

## **The Study**

This article is based on research from a larger study of first-tier managers within four FE colleges (referred to here as Blackton, Woodland, Parklands and Eastshire) as they attempt to manage and cope with change and resistance. The study adopted an ethnographic approach, a methodology particularly suited to organisational research of post-bureaucratic and service-based organisations (Brannon et al, 2007). The purposive sample consisted of 27 first-tier managers – often called Curriculum Team Leaders or Programme Managers – in four general FE colleges and took place over a year. The research began with the use of the critical incident technique (see Flanagan, 1954; Chell & Pittaway, 1998) which allowed me to define the research themes to be pursued and to provide data on the daily working experiences of the participants. The second and third round of fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews lasting up to an hour. In the fourth round, a variety of methods were used to provide triangulation of the primary data, including: observations of the FTMs in meetings; data analysis of job application packs from colleges nationwide; an online survey of principals; two focus groups of lecturers; and a questionnaire.

## **First-Tier Managers**

While research into leadership and management in FE is a growth area, the extant literature focuses primarily on principals and senior leaders (see, for example, Izzatt-White et al, 2004; IzzattWhite, 2005; Kelly, Izzatt-White, Randall & Rouncefield, 2004; Kelly, Izzatt-White & Randall, 2004). The first-tier manager is a role that is severely neglected, with few studies discussing this level of management despite calls over the last 20 years for a greater examination of this role (McNay, 1989; Lumby, 1997).

This study found that the role of first-tier manager is heterogeneous, elastic, contested, poorly understood and often badly defined (Page, 2010). At one extreme was Woodside College where Programme Leaders received no salary increments for their role and only two hours' remission from teaching. Here FTMs managed the curriculum alone, with Human Resource Management (HRM) duties being undertaken by the head of school. At the other end of the continuum were Curriculum Leaders at Parklands College. Technically and hierarchically middle managers, some simultaneously also fulfilled a programme leadership role in their subject specialism (a cost-cutting exercise for the college). HRM procedures had been fully devolved and they line-managed up to 30 staff while receiving an increased salary and up to 16 hours' remission.

The majority of FTMs were internal promotees and experienced difficulty in the transition from being one of the team to managing the team, especially where the role necessitated performance management tasks such as appraisal and teaching observations of former colleagues. As such, the FTMs interviewed occupied a kind of occupational limbo: no longer solely a teacher, most were reluctant to fully embrace the identity of 'manager'. Thus, occupying the border position between teachers and management, FTMs provided an ideal lens through which to study resistance in colleges.

## **Lecturer Resistance**

To investigate the extent of lecturer resistance, a survey was designed using Prasad & Prasad's (1998) categorisation of resistance:

1. Firstly, there are 'open confrontations', often union supported (if not instigated), strikes and walkouts being the most common forms. However, in the contemporary HRM-infused workplace, the exploitation of official procedures such as grievance procedures or whistleblowing are also significant examples.
2. Secondly, there are 'subtle subversions', those actions 'capable of subverting authority relations' (Prasad & Prasad, 1998, p. 234), such as sabotage, theft and 'acts of carelessness' such as the 'accidental' misfiling of documents. Here also is the territory of discursive appropriation as workers use management rhetoric against managers (Ezzamel et al, 2001).
3. Thirdly, there is 'disengagement', where workers extricate themselves from management ideologies and the mechanisms of enculturation through the creation of subjective space, and the political deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995) of resistant discourse such as bitching (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999). Here also we find resistance enacted through humour, perhaps the most multifaceted of resistant behaviours which acts variously as an adaptive defence mechanism (Bovey & Hede, 2001), relief from the boredom of everyday routine (Collinson, 2002) or a form of attack against supervision (Taylor & Bain, 2003).
4. Finally, there is 'ambiguous accommodation' in which workers' cooperation with managerial objectives functions as a disguise for routine resistance or becomes a method of reclaiming control over the work. Here individuals may enact the dramaturgical self (Collinson, 2003) and impression management (Singh, 2001) to posit alignment with organisational imperatives while simultaneously rendering their exercise of subjectivity oblique as it simulates organisational citizenship behaviour (Bolino, 1999).

Given the diversity of resistant behaviours, it was impossible to include every permutation within the literature and so each category contained five distinct types. Each first-tier manager was asked to rate each form of resistance on a scale of 0 to 5 according to how often they experienced it, whether it was aimed at themselves or the Senior Management Team (SMT). The responses to the survey were then used as the basis for questioning on the most highly rated forms of resistance.

### **Open Confrontations**

The most common form of open confrontation was criticism in meetings of management or changes, although this happened mainly at the team meeting level; where more senior managers were present, open dissent was virtually non-existent, mainly due to fear of reprisal (see Jameson, 2010). Although many principals were actively trying to engage teaching staff in a dialogue, in many cases this was seen as simulacramatic and inauthentic leadership – the likelihood that dissent would be listened to was considered remote, yet this accusation was not solely targeted at senior managers. Middle managers were seen as gatekeepers of critical upwards communication and stifled open dissent. In an extreme example, Sue at Parklands College formed a coalition with other managers at her level and drafted a paper concerning the issues they faced. Their wish was to present it to senior managers yet they showed it to their line managers first:

We took it to [our line managers] who said 'you realise what would happen if we take these conditions that you've got or demands or whatever you want to call them, if we take them to SMT, you know what will happen?' We said 'no' and they said 'we'll lose our jobs because if you start having that communication between you and SMT then they will consider that our tier doesn't need to be there' ... we went 'OK, we don't want you to lose your jobs' [*laughs*] and that was the end of it. So we all got back into our little silos.

Less common were the other forms of resistance. 'Going to the union' was a threat often invoked by teaching staff yet rarely followed through, as was the use of HRM policies such as the grievance procedure. Perhaps the most combative form within this category – refusing to cooperate – was rare, perhaps as a result of the vehemence with which it was challenged:

I've had one member of the team that's refused to cooperate quite a lot but I managed to – well, they found another job. I pushed them as hard as I could towards finding another job. I sort of pushed them through a disciplinary route as well ... sometimes people refuse for very valid reasons but you still need them to do it. Still made them do it and deal with the outcome in terms of their resentments [*laughs*]. (David – Blackton)

### Subtle Subversions

Subtle subversions were the least evident forms of routine resistance in the study. Sabotage was rare but highly effective, especially at Eastshire College. In their yearly internal inspection, senior managers had changed the notice period for observed lessons, from identifying the lesson in advance to telling lecturers they could be observed at any time within a two-week period. The response of Michelle's team was to sabotage the inspection:

This week we've had a pre-inspection check, checking paperwork, and some staff have decided that they're going to rebel against this by not having the paperwork necessary that they should have in order to teach. So when various managers and curriculum leaders turned up to observe their lessons and check their paperwork, they wouldn't have a scheme of work, they wouldn't have a lesson plan, they wouldn't be doing what they would normally be doing, they would just sit and talk – it would be very teacher-centred and it was a way of protesting against having what they see as a mini-inspection and an unnecessary burden at this time of year.

Michelle at first assumed that these acts of sabotage were restricted to her team but she later discovered that it was happening throughout the college. Senior managers attempted to play down the actions of lecturers and never mentioned them officially. Instead they issued a best practice report of the inspection which focused on elements of good teaching that had been observed by non-resistant lecturers. Thus we are reminded of Scott's (1985) conception of the powerful who refuse to acknowledge insubordination 'as this would be admitting that a policy is unpopular and exposes the tenuousness of their authority' (p. 26).

While sabotage was rare, one form of subtle subversion was common, that of spreading rumours or gossip. Some FTMs considered this less a form of resistance than a coping mechanism, especially when significant organisational change was occurring. However, Tracey at Parklands College found herself the target of a more malicious form on two occasions. Firstly, after an interview for an internal position, her team spread the rumour that she had been unsuccessful and the panel intended to re-advertise the position. On another occasion, her sickness leave was said to be an excuse to avoid an internal inspection. Both were unfounded; their lack of substance, however, did not render them less hurtful to Tracey, who also considered being gossiped about as a form of martyrdom:

*Interviewer:* How did [those rumours] make you feel?

*Tracey:* Oh, I've got very broad shoulders so takes a lot to upset me – occasionally I do. I try not to and not where it's very visible. I might go home and scream and shout but at the end of the day you know, all the time they're talking about me they're not talking about anybody else [*laughs*].

Gossip, on the other hand, appeared to be an attempt to manipulate FTMs. In cases where middle managers suppressed dissent, gossip was enacted within the hearing of FTMs, seemingly in the hope that the FTM would act upon it. In Eastshire College Lynette was regularly the audience for gossip about the lack of information about organisational changes – the suspicion of lecturers was that she was withholding information. At Blackton College, Steph's team would gossip in front of her (while distinctly not involving her) about the inequity of resource allocation in the hope of acquiring additional remission. What is significant here is the risk-free nature of gossip and rumours as forms of everyday resistance and the attempt to subvert the process of transactional management.

## Disengagement

Disengagement was the most common form of routine resistance in the study, with 'being unenthusiastic' the most highly scored of all of the behaviours. However, it was also apparent that a lack of enthusiasm was not a generic state among teaching staff and was seen as a response to a specific number of stimuli, especially instructions from managers, organisational change and meetings. Enthusiasm was reserved for teaching and engagement with learners rather than organisational duties and was, given the emotional labour involved in teaching, the most energy-efficient form of resistance. Yet there was also the suggestion that being unenthusiastic was the inevitable response to the institutional amnesia present in all four of the colleges. Amnesia in this study was not seen as the proclivity of institutions to lose organisational knowledge, as discussed in much of the literature (see Fernandez & Sune [2009], for example); here it was seen in the very literal sense of forgetting what had happened in the past and re-presenting historical change initiatives as new, rendering many established lecturers unenthusiastic. Yet there was also evidence that institutional forgetfulness was exploited by teaching staff in ignoring emails and not attending meetings. When challenged by FTMs for non-response to emailed requests, the reply was often that they had forgotten, a difficult to challenge claim given the forgetful culture they worked in.

Yeah, saying 'yes that's fine I'll do that' and then when you ask them 'oh I forgot' or 'erm, oh, when was that supposed to be in by?' 'Well I did send you an email and you have had the minutes of the meeting blah blah blah' but all kind of not recorded, not taken that on board ... they're very 'oh I'll go and do it now' and they will go off and do it but there's often a 'you should have reminded me'. Well no actually, you should have remembered. (Steph – Blackton)

Again it was apparent that those emails and meetings concerned with managerial imperatives were most likely to be ignored while those concerning learners were prioritised.

In common with Jameson (2007), the data suggests that there is a significant interactional distance between senior managers and staff. However, while often seen as a failing of the SMT to engage with teaching staff, this study found evidence that lecturers actively cultivate the space and are agentive in creating distance from managers:

I have a feeling that teachers don't particularly want to be involved with senior managers, they just want to get on with their job and they see senior management as something quite separate that doesn't really have a huge – that it wouldn't benefit them really in any way to be more involved. I think that's borne out by the lack of attendance at meetings senior managers arrange, drop in sessions for people. So unless I specifically request staff to go, they usually wouldn't. (Carol – Parklands)

This distance was also evident at Eastshire College. The principal planned an all-staff meeting to discuss the impending changes within the college; few lecturers attended, much to the embarrassment of middle managers. Instead, the principal had to attend numerous team meetings which teaching staff could not escape.

However, while many forms of distancing are founded upon the perceived competition of values – the teaching professional versus the managerial college – there was also evidence of distance from the work itself, an attitude shared by Cheryl, FTM at Parklands:

I think most [lecturers] see it as a job yeah. I mean there are one or two that don't have a family and you can see that they throw themselves into the job more than the majority of us do ... I just wouldn't be able to commit myself to the amount of time and energy required to throw yourself into a vocation rather than a job.

Humour is perhaps the most problematic form of routine resistance and can potentially be seen in a number of categories of resistance. It can function as a way of relieving the boredom of routine (Collinson, 2002), an adaptive defence mechanism against stress and anxiety (Bovey & Hede, 2001), 'an explicit rejection of disciplined and even ordered behaviour' (Ackroyd & Thompson,



1997, p. 106) or directive attack. In the interviews, FTMs considered humour primarily as a form of coping:

Again I think that's [joking] quite common. You see little enclaves of staff and that chattering but again I think it's probably done more as a defence mechanism or understanding or coping – you know, we've got to deal with it, let's make a joke of it, let's tell everybody how rubbish it is. (Alan – Parklands)

However, data arising from the observations identified humour in its more confrontational and directive form, especially during team meetings. During a carpentry team meeting at Woodside college, the FTM – Keith – informed the team that they had been asked to make a wooden leaving present for the principal who was about to retire. In their suggestions of what they could build, humour as attack was foregrounded:

*Lecturer 1:* What do you call that wooden frame that has a length of rope hanging from it?

*Lecturer 2:* Give him a picture of Woodside and say 'you arranged for this shit hole to be built'.

*Lecturer 3:* Give him one of the tree seats that have gone wrong – it'll remind him of this place.

### **Ambiguous Accommodation**

Cynicism was the most common form of ambiguous accommodation and was considered endemic throughout the colleges. In the majority of cases cynicism was targeted at senior managers on two grounds: firstly, lecturers considered that senior managers had little idea of what their work was like and the demands they faced. Secondly, the SMT was seen as lacking (or had forgotten) the values implicit within education and the primacy of learners:

I think they perceive that managers don't really know what a student is, that in this targetdriven culture a student is a little figure on a piece of paper which indicates success or failure and is not a real person. (Carol – Parklands)

However, cynicism was not only aimed at senior managers; in some cases students were the target:

I think from the point of view of the students, how staff can be cynical [about them] as well, that actually they're only here because they get their EMA [educational maintenance allowance] which is a very cynical thing ... We did have a member of staff who did actually say some of our students are here because of EMA to senior management and the senior manager actually turned round to the member of staff and said 'don't be so cynical'. (Nadia – Blackton)

'Making out', those actions that work the system or manipulate official procedures, (Noon & Blyton, 1997) was evident in a variety of examples but most commonly in regard to policies and institutional systems, the perfect example concerning electronic registers. All four colleges used electronic registers and, in all cases, they created a number of repetitive administrative problems. In many cases lecturers would rigorously complete the register only to receive a strongly worded email from the Management Information Systems (MIS) department that the register was blank. Learners would then not receive their educational maintenance allowance (EMA) and so accuse their teacher of not completing the registers. As a result, lecturers would often complete 'blank' registers by marking all students as attending. However, panoptically, attendance figures gleaned from electronic registers were also used as a performance management measure – high attendance was equated by some college managers as indicative of effective teaching. In response, some lecturers would make out as a form of impression management:

We had a member of staff who we got rid of eventually who a lot of his registers were marked as present to get his attendance figures so they looked good when they weren't ... I think part of the ethos is that if you look at the system and you've got poor attendance it would often be deemed that if the students aren't turning up you're doing something wrong, so therefore as a defence against that, you'd mark them as present. (Jim – Parklands)

## Managing Resistance or Collusion?

The data suggested that FTMs themselves were not the target of most resistant behaviours. The object of routine resistance was generally senior managers and the constituents of the resistant context. However, while avoiding its aim, FTMs were the *audience* for routine resistance – they heard the gossip, they heard the criticism of college policy, they noticed the lack of enthusiasm and cynicism. As audience, FTMs were therefore faced by a dilemma:

1. As routine resistance was mainly directed at senior management, if they challenged it they risked identifying themselves with the management that lecturers were resisting in the first place. As a result, they risked the withdrawal of cooperation so essential for the effectiveness of their role.
2. The second choice was to turn a blind eye and risk being seen by senior managers as colluding with resistant behaviour, a certain impediment to interactional efficacy with their own line manager and damaging promotion prospects.
3. Before challenging resistance, FTMs had to be sure of the support of senior managers if the situation escalated.

The issue of trust further complicated FTMs' situation. Lecturers actively distrusted senior managers yet generally trusted FTMs; FTMs in turn trusted lecturers yet also distrusted senior managers. Given the precariousness of this position, there was inevitably a range of responses from FTMs themselves based upon their primary focus: those FTMs who mostly identified with the organisation and sought promotion were the most likely to challenge resistance; those FTMs who were student and team focused and mostly identified themselves as teachers were most likely to turn a blind eye.

Organisation-focused FTMs were those who sought advancement and appeared most 'managerial'. As such, their identification with the organisation may have created a proclivity to persecute even relatively benign forms of everyday resistance, especially under the gaze of those with the power to promote. In addition, organisation-focused FTMs tended to be highly individualistic in their work and talked less about their team or their students. At the other end of the continuum were those FTMs who saw their role as distinctly un-managerial, whose identity was firmly ensconced within the teaching paradigm. Here participants adopted a strategy of 'benign neglect' (MacLean, 2001) and turned a blind eye to resistance. Key to this position was the FTMs' own relationship with senior managers, and Linda at Eastshire provides an ideal example. Linda discussed how her Head of School was ineffective in his role, often absent because of 'personal issues' and generally ambivalent concerning the success of the department. As a result, the team had begun to gossip about him quite openly in front of Linda while consciously not involving her in the discussion. In response, Linda herself had become ambivalent:

Three quarters of the time I probably turn a blind eye to be honest and then [the] other quarter I might sort of say 'come on guys, it's really not the place to talk about it' or something like that but yeah, it's a bit of a half-hearted attempt to be honest ... I'm not sure I'd know exactly how to go about doing that without actually make them feel like they can't actually say anything in front of you ... or isolating myself from them in a way. Which I guess maybe for the role – well, in some ways it might be a good thing, in some ways it might not be a good thing.

The issue of trust is again dominant here: collude and be mistrusted by middle and senior managers; challenge and be mistrusted by lecturers.

## Discussion

Viewed through the lens of labour process theory, colleges have appropriated time via increased contact hours, professional autonomy via increased performativity measures and the processes of proletarianisation and job security via casualisation. As such, the data suggest that the working existence of teachers in FE can be seen as a narrative of loss which provides a proclivity to resist all forms of managerial incursions into the professional context of lecturers. The decline of trust, the decline of unionisation and the stifling of overt dissent has created a context where resistance has become an everyday activity, covert and hidden in the 'quiet subterranean realms of

organizational life' (Fleming & Sewell, 2002, p. 863). Resistance has become as much a part of the working day for the contemporary FE professional as teaching, yet the data suggest that resistance from lecturers is not random and is not targeted at senior managers as a matter of course. Resistance – as much as being an attack – was found to be a defence. For example, withholding enthusiasm was found to be the most common expression of resistance from lecturers, yet, rather than being an attack upon senior managers perceived to be obsessed with myopic change and financial imperatives, being unenthusiastic was a defence of the core role of teaching and lecturers' responsibility for student welfare and success. Resistance from this point of view was not an attack impelled by class inequalities in a pseudo-capitalistic workplace, but, more simply, a means to prioritise teaching and learning. Here, then, labour process theory is inadequate for a complete discussion of routine resistance in FE – while re-appropriation helps us to explain certain forms of resistance, what must also be focused upon is the subjectivity of lecturers and their defence of their identity as educators.

Yet micro-political forms of resistance – withholding enthusiasm, cynicism, humour – ultimately pose little significant challenge to senior managers and can even be seen as supporting and replicating the power structures within the organisation. Fleming & Spicer (2003), for example, argue that cynicism offers a 'specious sense of freedom' while actors still perform the work role – although the cynical worker may not identify with corporate rituals, they still *act* as if they do; workers may make jokes about managers but they still perform the work expected of them. From this perspective, some strategies of routine resistance – including gossip and distance as well as cynicism and humour – are seen by Contu (2008) as 'decaf resistance', behaviours that do not 'constitute a threat to dominant order in the workplace' (p. 368). *Real* resistance for Contu is a form of industrial heroism that 'suspends and changes the constellation of power relations' (p. 364) and bears a perilous cost for the actor (presumably dismissal or even prosecution). What this perspective lacks, however, is pragmatism – in the insecure workplace of FE, with families to support and bills to pay, employees need to keep their jobs and so heroism is a perilous, and even masochistic, pursuit. But beyond pragmatics, heroic resistance – especially strikes – are perceived by lecturers to damage only the student body rather than the machinations of 'The System'; as such, resistance that attacks the 'constellation of power relations' is an affront to the deeply held values of lecturers and FTMs. As a result, routine and covert forms of resistance such as cynicism and humour may often seem the only viable strategy of resistance to preserve the well-being of students. But more than that, so-called decaf forms of resistance provide a defence against indoctrination by the financial imperatives of senior management whereby teachers can remain teaching and distance themselves from the managerialism so prevalent in the sector.

And if some forms of routine resistance are 'decaf', others found in this study are 'espresso': brief, strong and effective. Refusal, sabotage and ignoring, while often momentary actions, can directly and potentially challenge authority relations without (and this is the major benefit) compromising the quality of the learner experience and without compromising the values of the actors. These forms of espresso resistance tended to be in response to the most overt forms of control, especially the obsession with quality enacted through perpetual surveillance within colleges; again the panoptic was evident. Just as the prisoner in the panoptic metaphor is controlled through the internalisation of discipline, so colleges appeared to have internalised the performativity of central control – while Ofsted may use a 'light touch' for higher quality institutions, this research found that internal inspections had become increasingly self-flagellant in an effort to present an image of rigour in self-evaluation reports; the simultaneous decentralisation and recentralisation of NPM is here very apparent. In response, in full knowledge of the importance of self-inspections within the accountability paradigm, lecturers were found to be highly resistant, sabotaging the process by teaching deliberately badly or refusing to be observed, a phenomenon that has become more organised and formalised elsewhere (*Times Education Supplement*, 2010b).

Against this background, first-tier managers occupy a precarious position. As teachers they were found to be just as resistant as the teams they managed, subject as they were to similar levels of managerialism, surveillance and performance management. Furthermore, FTMs distrusted senior managers perhaps even more than lecturers. Yet, while they were managed, they were also

manager; while they were surveilled, so too were they expected to perform surveillance upon their teams; while they resisted performativity, they were also complicit in fulfilling the mechanisms through which performativity was enacted. As such, a schism is apparent in the accounts of the participants, a dual identity between teacher and manager that never seemed entirely reconciled. On the one hand, they would collude with resistant behaviours that attempted to manipulate the panoptic through strategies such as falsifying registers; on the other hand, FTMs foregrounded the importance of teams and teamwork, thus facilitating the concertive control of horizontal panopticism. As such, while the FTMs in the sample were virtually unanimous in suggesting that resistance was not aimed at them, it is possible that their determination to identify themselves as part of the team, rather than managing the team, provided an idealised perspective. While their subjectivity emphasised student welfare, professional autonomy and the defence of their teams from the excesses of managerialist dogma, the extent to which this identity mirrored how lecturers saw them was debatable. It was highly probable that they too, as managers, were the targets of resistance.

## Conclusion

Further education is a resistant context: surveillance, accountability, managerialism, individualisation and proletarianisation have become so embedded within the daily experience of college lecturers that any act by senior managers is likely to be resisted. Where professionalism has been appropriated, so is it re-appropriated; where financial imperatives have become the defining impetus within colleges, routine resistance seeks to reprioritise teaching and learning and the student experience. Yet while there is the temptation to perceive resistance as rightful and principled, it should also be seen as a coping mechanism, a non-compliant strategy for protecting the cognitive and physical self. While in any discussion of resistance there is the temptation to reify resistant acts as heroic altruism, the micro-political pragmatics of organisational life for FTMs and lecturers cannot be ignored. Within the resistant context of FE, morals are one thing – getting through each day is quite another.

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